

copy to H. WITTSBERG - VOL 2 - ISSUE - WINTER, 1996

Much attention has recently been focused on the question of whether the Zapruder film as we know it is the camera original, or some edited and altered version. This issue is one that has concerned me since July, 1970, when I first had the opportunity to examine 35mm positives—made directly from what was supposedly the 8mm original—in the Beverly Hills office of TIME-LIFE, at which time it became clear that there were splices on the film that had never been reported, and (b) that the wounds looked odd, and had a “painted on” quality.

Since the film was for all practical purposes unavailable, the issues raised by a close examination of the frames were not discussed at any length in *Best Evidence* (though I did write a long footnote about possible CIA possession of the film, prior to its going to LIFE Magazine—see Chapter 24). However, those issues are central to the question of whether the President’s wounds were altered between the time the body was seen at Parkland Hospital, and the Bethesda autopsy some 6 hours later.

The Zapruder film is important because, for all practical purposes, that 8mm contains the only “medical photographs” of the President’s wounds, as they were in Dallas; and that photograph record does not show what the Dallas doctors saw—a wound at the back of the head.

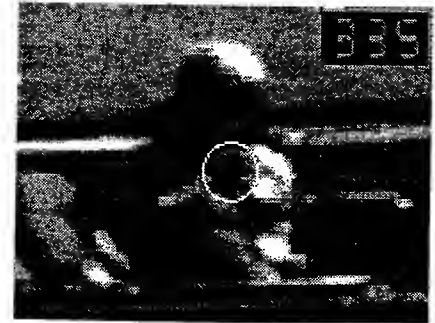
Instead, the back of the head shows a blacked out area, frame 313 shows an explosion at the front of the head, and several frames following frame 313—notably frames 335 and 337—show what is supposed to be wound there.

Is the film correct, and were all the Dallas doctors—with a description of a wound at the back of the head—wrong? Or was the film, along with the body, altered, to reflect different medical-legal facts—i.e., to support a false story of a President shot only from behind?

That is what the issue is all about, and I am delighted to see a new generation of researchers address the subject. The discussions at the 1996 Lancer Conference in Dallas were an important step in airing and studying many of these issues.

THE ZAPRUDER FILM and The President's Wounds

by David Lifton



1. I maintain that the issue of whether the Zapruder film has been altered is going to come down to the following measurable and testable matters:

a. Densitometry conducted on what appears to be the blacked out area at the back of the head (which is particularly obvious in the reversal 35mm prints I had made, directly from the Weitzman 35mm original, in which the blacked out area reproduces as a white area, tracking the back of the head from frame to frame, in much the same way that TV broadcasts today obscure the face of someone whose picture they do not wish broadcast, for legal reasons)

b. Expert optical studies conducted on the original Zapruder film to find out why the area between the sprocket holes has a different “tint,” when the original is laid out on a table at the National Archives. Experts (e.g., from Kodak) should be able to render an opinion as to whether this is something associated with the mechanism of the camera (which I greatly doubt) or whether it is in fact an artifact created in connection with the fabrication of a 35mm master (to be reduced to a “camera original 8”) and in which material was deliberately inserted in the

sprocket hole area because, to leave that area blank, would immediately expose the fraud.

c. A comparison of the “home movie” side of the film with the “assassination side” of the film, to see whether, microscopically, the “slit structure” matches. (Remember: they are like side A and B of a typewriter ribbon; and therefore, the home movie side would also have to be edited so that, when slit, it would match, at the microscopic level).

2. Obviously, David Mantik’s measurements from which he concludes that there is monotonic magnification of the upper part of the frame should be carefully tested, and with control studies if possible. I don’t believe that any assertion made by Robert Groden about this area (or any other, as a matter of fact) should be relied upon—and particularly any assertions he makes regarding any “control” film made during the filming of JFK (i.e., the so-called Larry Howard film).

The above statement stems from my personal experience with Groden and his lack of credibility, in general (details available upon request). As to the Z film in particular, the fact that Groden has had over 25 years of exposure on

various occasions to the original Zapruder film (at the NYC lab, EFX for example)—on one occasion proudly snipping off a piece of that original (yes, from the original leader), which he showed me with great pride at his home, as if he had a lock of hair from the body of JFK—and yet *failed to notice* (or, if he did, failed to report) that the left hand side of the film (in the intra-sprocket hole area) had a different tint, should be enough of a commentary on Groden's powers of observation or lack of competence or both. And note: Groden has for some 20 years or more maintained that it is the existence of image in this area—the very area where the optical properties are different and the film evinces this peculiar “tint”—that “proves” (Groden's quote) that it's an original!

3. Having worked with the original 35 mm Weitzman negative (Weitzman was the fellow in charge at EFX), I maintain the head does indeed turn at least 135 degrees in two frames. Moreover, if Groden will surrender that item (which was returned to Weitzman after I used it in 1990, and then given by Weitzman to Groden) and which Groden now denies (under oath, as I understand it) that he has (and not only that 35mm item, but all the remaining 35mm Weitzman Z internegatives [some half-dozen more, based on what Weitzman told me back in 1990) then it will be easier to get an objective “jury” to look at what we might call “best evidence” and verify that my perception (which agrees with Noel Twyman, and others) is in fact accurate.

We cannot do this work if—with respect to these key 35mm Z internegatives made back in 1967—a key person in this affair behaves like a compulsive collector rather than a mature researcher.

4. If a control study is done with a car coming down the street, lurching to a quick halt, and then accelerating afterward, I maintain it would be rather elementary, on an optical printer, to remove the stop. That is exactly what optical printers can be utilized to accomplish—in effect, in an edit of this type, selecting a subset of frames to produce on a duplicate film. So let's add that to the “to do” list of control studies that ought to be done. Computer simulations are well and good, but let's do the actual thing; and see what it looks like.

Personally, I do not believe a computer study can prove that an optical printer cannot do this and do so credibly; but will concede the point if a control study filming an actual car going down Elm Street establishes for some reason a car stop cannot be removed (and credibly). Moreover, to those who argue things would “move faster,” I respond that they do! (1) The head snap (by Art and Margaret Snyder's work) is too fast to come from a bullet and (2) The head turn (though some disagree) is exactly the effect that one would expect.

5. Regarding the white spot on the lawn (which Todd Vaughn informs me he suspects is the “discarded white paper ‘peel-off’ from the first Moorman photograph,” an explanation I find highly plausible):

a. I commend Cecil Jones who found the white spot on the lawn depicted in Bothun #4 (on page 156 of Pictures of the Pain) and which I now learn has been known and commented upon for some years by Todd Vaughn. I make the following commentary:

(1) Contrary to Jim Fetzer, I never believed that—if this item was inserted—its purpose was to make the limo

“move”; the limo “moves” by virtue of the fact that (if an optical printer was used then) a subset of frames was selected in which the car's position moves up the street. While the white piece of paper makes the movement more obvious (more easily visible, or measurable, if you will), it is not the white spot that makes the limo “move.” It is the selected subset of film frames, and the fact that the car has advanced up the street from frame to frame.

(2) Consequently, when (at the “closed” Lancer Z-film symposium) I first saw David Mantik's discovery that the white item was absent in the frames as published in LIFE, but present on the Zapruder film (qua film; i.e., on the Archives slide set, or on the Weitzman 35mm negative of the original 8mm), I concluded that, if David Mantik's interpretation was correct (i.e., that it had been added) then it must have been added to make the motion more readily visible (or perhaps as an internal reference point to those doing the illicit manipulation).

However, if the white item was not “added” to the film—but in fact “subtracted from” (i.e., painted out of) those particular frames as published in LIFE—then the true explanation may be found by reversing (or “inverting,” I'm not sure which metaphor is better) the argument, to wit:

CONJECTURE: that the alteration of the film took some time; that a “subset” of frames was in effect “approved for release” within the first 72 hours (for publication in LIFE) and that in those specific frames, the white paper item was removed because the reassembly of the frames as a motion picture film had not yet occurred, and this very visible and obvious spatial reference point may have been seen as possibly troublesome (i.e., restrictive, in the future; in a final synthesis of the frames as a motion picture film).

6. In any event, the following two things need to be investigated (and I would think the second one is easy):

a. The best possible copies of LIFE for 11/29/63 ought to be located, to test the “subtraction” hypothesis—i.e., to see if there is any evidence of airbrushing on the frames (as published) at the spot in the lawn where, in the film itself, this white piece of paper appears; moreover, the same study ought to be undertaken in connection with the 10/64 “Warren Report” issue, in which some of the same frames appear. (It seems highly unlikely to me that LIFE's editors would reach in with their paintbrushes and, for some innocent reason, remove a piece of litter lying on the grass in Dealey Plaza). Does anyone really believe such an erasure—if it occurred—is innocent??

b. On or about 11/28/63, the Associated Press (or UPI, I'm not sure) released a wire service story (accompanied by pictures) about the film, and (as I recall) included those same frames published in Life.

Therefore, I suggest:

First, that those frames—released via the wire service—ought to be carefully examined, to see whether the white item appears in them (i.e. to see whether whatever was done to eliminate it was peculiar to Life, or extended to wire service dissemination as well)

Second: I would like to call to everyone's attention the fact that in the press release accompanying those frames—i.e., a release quoted in the 11/28 or 11/29/63 story—it is pointed out that the President's head moves slightly forward, in response to the fatal shot. This to me is a remarkable statement inasmuch as the slight forward motion was inde-

pendently discovered only years later by first generation critic Salandria (and Tink Thompson) back in 1966; and by the late physicist Dr. Richard Feynmann, when I brought that sequence to his office seeking his endorsement for the backward head snap, and he measured the frames on the page, and discovered the small forward movement between frame 312 and 313 (see Chapter 2 of Best Evidence for details of my meeting).

What I'm saying is that someone connected with the release of that film back on 11/29/63 (i.e., someone who wrote the accompanying press release) was very much aware of one of the finer points (discovered by the research community years later); moreover, in this instance, one such fine point (the slight forward motion between 312 and 313) was not only *not* considered by the Warren Commission, it was curiously obscured by the FBI's reversal of the critical frames in CE 885, which was the convenient desk-top "still motion" tool that would be used by Warren Commission attorneys (just as I used it with Dr. Richard Feynman). Therefore, I think that—whether Mantik's interpretation of the white spot/no white spot conflict proves to be the correct one—it is not the presence of the white spot on the 8mm film; but rather its "absence" in the first published version that is significant.

So certainly, there is additional work to be done.

David Lifton

Students' Symposium

by Jamie Sawa and Glen Vasbinder

On Thursday, November 21, 1996, we attended our first JFK conference. We'd been asked by JFK Lancer to present a general overview of John F. Kennedy's life, times, assassination, and aftermath to an assembled group of high school students and newcomers to the field of JFK assassination research.

Glenn led off the presentation by taking a look at the life and times of John F. Kennedy, including what was happening socially and economically in the 1960s during Kennedy's presidency. Glenn concluded his part of the presentation discussing JFK's trip to Texas and the reasons behind it.

Jamie picked up with the motorcade through downtown Dallas, the assassination, the rush to Parkland Hospital, and the return to Washington, D.C. He covered the various investigations of the assassination, the numerous conspiracies and coverups, and listed some of the possible perpetrators. He ended the presentation with a vigorous call to action by everyone interested in seeking the truth behind the murder of President Kennedy.

In addition to the Lancer Conference, we also toured both the Sixth Floor Museum and The Conspiracy Museum, and were fortunate enough to be in Dealey Plaza for the memorial service held on November 22.

We were very impressed by the presenters and the overall content of the Lancer Conference, and met many wonderful people dedicated to solving the mystery of who murdered President Kennedy.

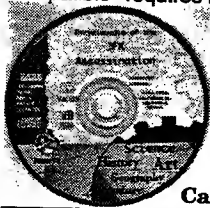


Jamie Sawa and Glen Vasbinder

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